

House Bill 1133

By: Representatives Smith of the 168th, Mosley of the 178th, Sims of the 169th, Walker of the 107th, Carter of the 159th, and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

To amend Part 2 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to competencies and core curriculum for elementary and secondary students under the "Quality Basic Education Act," so as to provide for the offering of state funded high school courses in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and the History and Literature of the New Testament Era; to provide for the adoption of the curricula for such courses by the State Board of Education; to provide for the topics of instruction, reading materials, and methods of teaching in such courses; to require certain training for teachers of such courses; to provide for certain matters relating to the employment and assignment of teachers of such courses; to provide for the granting of academic credit for the successful completion of such courses; to provide for the monitoring of the content and teaching of such courses; to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.

Part 2 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to competencies and core curriculum for elementary and secondary students under the "Quality Basic Education Act," is amended by adding at the end thereof a new Code section to read as follows:

"20-2-148.

(a) All public schools with grade nine or above may make available to eligible students in grades nine through 12 an elective course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and an elective course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era. The purpose of such courses shall be to accommodate the rights and desires of those teachers and students who wish to teach and study the Old and New Testaments and to familiarize students with the contents of the Old and New Testaments, the history recorded

1 by the Old and New Testaments, the literary style and structure of the Old and New
2 Testaments, the customs and cultures of the peoples and societies recorded in the Old and
3 New Testaments, and the influence of the Old and New Testaments upon law, history,
4 government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

5 (b)(1) No later than July 1, 2006, the State Board of Education shall adopt a curriculum
6 for each course, including objectives, reading materials, and lesson plans, which has been
7 prepared in accordance with the requirements of this subsection and in consultation with
8 the Attorney General.

9 (2) The topics to be included in the course in the History and Literature of the Old
10 Testament Era may include the historical background and events of the period; the history
11 of the Kingdom of Israel; the poetry of the Old Testament; the influence of Old
12 Testament history and literature on subsequent art, music, literature, law, and events,
13 including recent and current events in the Middle East. The topics to be included in the
14 course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era may include the historical
15 background and events of the period; the life of Jesus of Nazareth; the parables of Jesus;
16 the life and travels of Paul; and the influence of New Testament history and literature on
17 subsequent art, music, literature, law, and events.

18 (3) The book or collection of books commonly known as the Old Testament shall be the
19 basic text for the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era, and the
20 book or collection of books commonly known as the New Testament shall be the basic
21 text for the course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era. In addition,
22 students may be assigned a range of reading materials for the courses, including
23 selections from secular historical and cultural works and selections from other religious
24 and cultural traditions. The courses shall familiarize students with the customs and
25 cultures of the times and places referred to in the Old and New Testaments. The courses
26 shall familiarize the students with the methods and tools of writing at the times the Old
27 and New Testament books were written, the means by which they were preserved, the
28 languages in which they were written and into which they were translated, and the
29 historical and cultural events which led to the translation of the Old and New Testaments
30 into the English language. The local board of education may determine which version
31 of the Old or New Testament shall be used as the main text or, if the local board of
32 education does not do so, that determination may be made by the teacher of the course.
33 No student shall be required to use one version as the sole text of the Old or New
34 Testament. If a student desires to use as the basic text a different version of the Old or
35 New Testament from that chosen by the local board of education or teacher, he or she
36 shall be permitted to do so.

1 (4)(A) The courses provided for in this Code section shall:

2 (i) Be taught in an objective and nondevotional manner with no attempt made to
3 indoctrinate the students as to either the truth or falsity of the biblical materials or as
4 to the correct interpretation thereof;

5 (ii) Not include teaching of religious doctrine or sectarian interpretation of the Bible;
6 and

7 (iii) Not disparage or encourage a commitment to a set of religious beliefs.

8 (B) At the discretion of the local board of education, the courses may familiarize the
9 students with the various theories and methods of analyzing, interpreting, and
10 understanding the Old and New Testaments. However, the courses shall not attempt
11 to coerce students to accept or reject any of these methods.

12 (C) The course shall include an emphasis on the relationship between the Bible and
13 each of the following: federal and state law; the structure of federal, state, and local
14 governments; and the United States' founding documents.

15 (c) The State Board of Education shall develop training materials and offer training
16 programs for the teachers of the courses provided for in this Code section no later than July
17 1, 2006. Such training materials and programs shall contain a segment devoted to the
18 freedom of religion clauses contained in the First Amendment of the United States
19 Constitution and the relevant United States Supreme Court and lower court decisions
20 interpreting these clauses.

21 (d) The provisions of this chapter relating to personnel employed by local units of
22 administration, including without limitation certification requirements, employment, and
23 supervision, shall apply to persons who teach the courses provided for in this Code section.
24 In addition, no person shall be assigned to teach such courses based in whole or in part on
25 any religious test, profession of faith or lack thereof, prior or present religious affiliation
26 or lack of affiliation, or criteria involving particular beliefs or lack thereof about the Bible.
27 Except for these requirements, the qualifications and training of teachers shall be
28 determined by the local boards of education.

29 (e) On and after July 1, 2006, for the purpose of earning Carnegie unit curriculum credits
30 at the high school level, satisfactory completion of the course in the History and Literature
31 of the Old Testament Era shall be accepted by the State Board of Education for one-half
32 unit of elective credit, and satisfactory completion of the course in the History and
33 Literature of the New Testament Era shall be accepted by the State Board of Education for
34 one-half unit of elective credit; provided, however, that such courses are taught in strict
35 compliance with the requirements of this Code section.

1 (f) A local board of education may make such arrangements for monitoring the content and
2 teaching of the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and the
3 course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era as it deems appropriate.

4 (g) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to limit the authority of a local board
5 of education to offer courses regarding the Old Testament or the New Testament that are
6 not in compliance with this Code section; provided, however, that no state funds distributed
7 pursuant to this article shall be expended in connection with such a course that does not
8 meet the requirements of this Code section.

9 (h) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to prohibit local boards of education
10 from offering elective courses based upon the books of other religions or societies. In
11 determining whether to offer such courses, the local board may consider various factors
12 including, but not limited to, student and parent demand for such courses and the impact
13 such books have had upon history and culture."

14 **SECTION 2.**

15 This Act shall become effective upon its approval by the Governor or upon its becoming law
16 without such approval.

17 **SECTION 3.**

18 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.